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Ancient Bodies: Archaeological Perspectives on Mesoamerican Figurines, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), July 1, 2017–February 4, 2018, Los Angeles County Museum of Art



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- 1 *Ancient Bodies: Archaeological Perspectives on Mesoamerican Figurines* explored the central role of archaeological excavation in situating ancient art and artifacts within a cultural framework. In April 2006, archaeologists discovered a masonry tomb chamber while excavating a grand pyramid in the ancient Maya city of El Perú-Waka', Petén, Guatemala. The tomb, dating to 600–650 CE, contained the remains of a ruler of the city and a rich array of funerary objects selected to accompany the ruler into the afterlife. Among these was an elaborate scene composed of ceramic figurines (Fig. 1.) depicting an ancient funerary ritual. Mourners purposefully arranged the figurines in the tomb to tell a story, perhaps their own story, and archaeological excavation documented and preserved that story. This assemblage of 23 individual figurines is a compelling example of the critical importance of archaeological context, or provenience—the location of an object and its position relative to other objects. While each figurine is singularly expressive, their meaning and power are truly anchored in the story they tell when engaged together as a scene.



- 2 Ancient Bodies presented figurines from Burial 39, one of the royal tombs excavated at El Perú-Waka', and nearly 50 additional figurines from LACMA's collection that represent ancient cultures from across Mesoamerica. Through an archaeological perspective, this exhibition invited new ways to perceive and experience the meaning embodied by the figurines in LACMA's collection.
 - 3 The installation was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art with the generous cooperation of Guatemala's Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología and the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes.
 - 4 Major support was provided by Daniel Greenberg, Susan Steinhauser, and the Greenberg Foundation; April and Ronald Dammann; and the Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles, and additional support was provided by The Arvey Foundation, and the Hitz Foundation via the Waka' Research Foundation.
 - 5 Reprinted from <http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/ancient-bodies>
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ABSTRACTS

Ancient Bodies: Archaeological Perspectives on Mesoamerican Figurines was on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) from July 1, 2017 to February 4, 2018. This exhibition explored the central role of archaeological excavation in situating ancient art and artifacts within a cultural framework.

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Keywords: Mayan terracottas, Mayan figurines, El Perú-Waka', Mayan funerary customs